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## Japan

### Agricultural Situation

### Japan Food Trends September 2008

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**Report Highlights:**

Many factors such as the environment, living costs, and health are forcing consumers to re-evaluate what and how they eat. Recycling chopsticks, odd-shaped vegetables, sugar-free sake are some of the Japanese market trends this month.

Japan Food Trends (JFT) communicates Japanese food and lifestyle trends that may help U.S. exporters to generate product and marketing ideas.

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## Editor's Notes

If you asked me ten years ago whether disposable chopsticks would become extinct, if Japanese would accept odd-shaped vegetables or if a sugar-free sake would be produced I would have quickly said no. However, today our lifestyles and priorities are quite different. Environmental friendliness is extremely important, waist lines have been standardized by the government and food prices are high. The Japanese are trying to shift their mindset and are accepting what once were impossibilities.

### Environment

**Chopsticks recycling expanding** *The Daily Yomiuri, August 30, 2008, p15*



"A nonprofit organization in Chiba is trying to encourage people to think twice before throwing their chopsticks away with their leftover food." The organization also recommends the usage of reusable chopsticks or personal chopsticks. According to the article, three pairs of recycled chopsticks can be turned into a postcard and two kilograms (4.4 lbs) of chopsticks are the same as three boxes of tissues.

Source: The Daily Yomiuri

Head of the disposable chopsticks recycling project, stands next to a collection box for used chopsticks at the Chiba Environmental Information Center.

There are rules for using chopsticks and here are some.

- Do not stick chopsticks into your food, especially not into rice. This is only done at funerals with rice that is put onto the altar.
- Do not pass food directly from your set of chopsticks to another's. Again, this is a funeral tradition that involves the bones of a cremated body.
- Do not spear food with your chopsticks.
- Do not point with your chopsticks.
- Do not wave your chopsticks around in the air or play with them.
- Do not move plates or bowls around with your chopsticks.

In any case, chopsticks are an essential part of Japanese food culture and should not be taken lightly.

### Odd-shaped, odd-sized vegetables

**Farm licensing: Odd-shaped, odd-sized vegetables sell at discounted prices** *Nikkei MJ, September 7, 2008, p5*

If you visited a supermarket in Japan and browsed through the vegetable section, you would most likely notice that the cucumbers are all pretty straight. Check other vegetables and you will see they are uniform in color, size and shape. Japanese have a fetish for sameness and shun odd-shaped or odd-sized vegetables. As a result, there has been a lot of waste, but companies are rethinking. To avoid industrial waste and to supply affordable vegetables odd-shaped and odd-sized vegetables are finding their niche market. An internet supermarket company has contracted with farmers to sell their produces through the internet. One section of their internet promotes odd-shaped, odd-sized vegetables.

In the caption,

“Odd-shaped & odd-sized vegetables,

True natural appearances

Flesh grown freely without stress

Vegetables are delicious no matter of shape or size

That is our motto”



Perhaps these carrots are a bit extreme to be placed even on U.S. supermarket shelves, but they are now being sold at discounted prices without going to the trash and helping to soften the impact on our wallets.



Source: OSIX

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### Alcoholic Beverages

***Sugar-free sake Japan Today (www.japantoday.com), September 10, 2008***



The largest sake brewer has produced a sugar-free sake that follows the footsteps of beer manufacturers and their sugar-free beverages. The first shipment left the plant on September 8. The taste is smooth and crisp (cho-tanrei-karakuchi for you sake connoisseurs). Personally, I enjoy a draft lager beer and then switch to cold sake. Sugar-free sounds good and would be healthier for me, but you know.....

Source: Japan Today

You might recall from previous issues that many alcoholic beverage articles have been introduced and you might start wondering about the editor, but no worries. Here is another beer article.

***Brewers join up to lure thirsty tourists The Daily Yomiuri, August 23, 2008, p15***

A welcome trend involving one of Japan's largest beer brewers, Sapporo Breweries Ltd., is collaborating with Hokkaido (the northern island of Japan) microbreweries to “develop and sell beer using ingredients produced on the island.” Sapporo has four partners, Tokachi Beer, Okhotsk Beer, Abashiri Beer, and Engaru Nogyo Shinko Kosha. Hopefully these microbreweries will increase consumer interest for craft beers.

### Mayonnaise Consumption

***Annual mayonnaise consumption Nihon Keizai Shimbun, August 29, 2008, p35***

According to the Japan Mayonnaise & Dressing Association consumption is 1,662 grams (3.66 pounds) in 2007, which is 12% lower than when consumption peaked in 1999. With metabolic syndrome standards and stronger tendencies to reduce calorie intake low-calorie mayonnaise products are helping mayonnaise lovers.

### Pet Food

***Dry type dog food: Hill's leads the pack Nikkei MJ, August 29, 2008, p3***

The pet food market is healthy. Especially the dry type dog food category is popular and Hill's tops the list. Hill's “Science Diet” series dominates the top 10 list with seven top selling products.



According to the Pet Food Industry Association, there were 22.5 million cats and dogs owned as pets in 2007. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications estimates that there are 5.25 million more cats and dogs than children less than 15 years old.

(Compared to 2002 the number of cats and dogs has increased by 30%.)

One interesting statistic is that only 1.1% of apartments in Tokyo accepted pets in 1998. In 2006 that increased to 74%



### **Marketplace: Department Stores**

***Tokyo department stores enticing young women*** The Daily Yomiuri, September 8, 2008, p7

The department store customer base is traditionally the middle-aged and older population. Tokyo department stores are unveiling their fresh and new twentysomething and thirtysomething sales sections. According to the article, "(i)n addition to attracting the youth yen, department stores also are wooing younger customers in the knowledge they will be the regular customers of tomorrow."



The Daily Yomiuri

***Ball point pens show signs of growth in digital age*** Nihon Keizai Shimbun, September 7, 2008, p9

As most of us rely on computers, internet and other digital equipment we probably use traditional writing tools such as a pen less and less. However, Japanese pen manufacturers' sales have gone up in the past two years after annual declines. 2007 sales, including exports, were 1.4 billion pens which was a 1.0% increase compared to the previous year. The total Japanese domestic market is estimated to be 680 million pens, which is also a 1.0% increase from the previous year. Why "back-to-pens"?

Mobile phones offer a variety of methods to communicate, including text. Middle and high school students find this means of communication extremely important especially since they can text message during class. This text messaging has become a writing art. Short passages filled with picture fonts and short-hand words/phrases are part of this art.

Writing letters and stick-on messages with picture fonts and short-hand words/phrases has also become a fad. More and more people are enjoying writing. Picture fonts have been transferred from the mobile phone to paper. People draw picture fonts to write messages on paper, but a single color does not justify the artistic writing. People are purchasing multi-color pen sets so they can draw the same picture fonts they use on their mobile phone.



Day planners are increasingly popular even in the digital world. Appointments, kid's practices, memos cover the pages with multiple colors. Business people also like to have a few chic pens and switch from day to day, like we change watches. Of course, pen manufacturers develop cool and easy-to-use pens that trend-setters will pick up for a few hundred yen. Personally, I like the way my Waterman pen writes and the convenience of my 4 in one pen.